

“Shami” A Public Life Narrator

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ABSTRACT

The public life of people in most cases are among forgotten parts of the Persian literature; in other words, most of the poets because of their too much attention to the kings and their actions and behaviors, followed by their disconnection with the inferior class of the society, have rarely composed poems on the public life of the people. The constitutional revolution to a great extent shifted this balance in favor of the public. In this paper, the anthology of the Kurdish blind poet “Shami” - which deals with the poor class of the society and the issues relating to it from a linguistic and thematic perspective - has been investigated and on the basis of the issues that embody most in the anthology, the poems relating to the public life have been categorized into four groups: 1. Life appliances and equipment, 2. Number of people, 3. Speech and 4. Customs and etiquette. This investigation showed that Shami is a poet that understands the pains and woes of the people and tries through an eloquent language to express pains and sufferings of his own class in a poetic form, offering it to the public. Hence, he can be called a social poet as such.

Keywords: Shami; Anthology; Speech; Customs and etiquette; Maxim

1. INTRODUCTION

Focusing on the public life of the people in the world is the result of the emergence of the realism school within 1845-1850. “In opposition to the romanticism school, Champflueury and his fellow Duranty, began to express scenes of the lives of the petit bourgeois and the laymen.

Duranty mostly investigated the social life and the customs and common practices of the people, trying to make his art be useful for the society as a whole” (Seidhousseiny, 1997: 274). In the old Iranian literature, often times some of the poets and authors have depicted some parts of the social life the people, including stories by Ubeid Zakani _in which he has addressed the issue of poverty_ or the famous poem by Anvari : “*O’ wind of dawn, if thou should pass by the city of Samarghand / Take the letter of the people of Khorasan to the court of the Khaghans*” (Anvari, 1997: 201) where he has referred to the people of Khorasan suffering from the Ghazans.

However too much attention to the public life and an expression of life angles of this group of people, ignored in the Persian literature is a main discussion after the constitutional revolution. In this regard, Shams Langaroodi, writes: “The origin of the poetry of the

constitutional era poets was the popular language , culture and the poems composed for the people engaged in the revolution”(Langaroodi, 1999: 38).

This paper, through this particular angle ; i.e. the presence of life issues , speech styles and etc..., laymen of the society attempts to investigate the poetry of Shami Kermanshahi and to seek other elements that find significance due to the importance of the underclass of the society because of the roles they had during the constitutional revolution.

Also, this paper strives to make known the accuracy of the poet in question and the intimate language arising from his life and presence among the poor people of the society as a member of a bigger context.

2. INTRODUCING THE POET

Based on the introduction by the collector of the Shami Kermanshahi anthology in the printed versions titled: “ChapkaGool” or “Bouquet”, the original name of the poet is Shahmorad Moshtagh pen named “Shami”.

He was born in 1921 in the city of Kermanshah. At 3, he lost his eyesight because of smallpox and in these years he lost his mother and his father passed away when he was 12. Hence, his uncle wife accepted to look after him, but after a while a charitable man named Haji Amanollah Motazedi was entrusted to take care of him and from then on he continued to live under the custodianship of this great man. Shami earned a living through trading goods like tea and grocery.

Being associated with the works of the other poets like Almas Khan Kandolaye and Seid Salah and through listening to their poems in evening parties, he gradually turned to composing poems. However due to illiteracy and blindness and the fact that no one was there to write down his poems, most of his poems were wiped off his mind and lost.

The exact time of Shami’s death is not known, but he was living in the area of Chenani in the city of Kermanshah until 1983, earning a living by hiring a room or two (Mardookh Roohani, 2006: 13-15).

The anthology at hand is the result of the efforts of the dear collector, Mr. Majid Mardookh Roohani and his followers. This paper is designed on the basis of the poems of the anthology. Investigating the Shami anthology depicts different parts of the popular lives of those years.

The anthology , having not more than 120 pages , is a small book , while as the proverb goes on “ you may know by a handful the whole sack” the book is an indicative of the ability and taste of the poet , involving themes prevalent in the society of Iran in that era. Of the cases that represent most in the book are life equipment and appliances, speech, customs and habits and etc.... . In the following lines the mentioned themes are going to be discussed:

2. 1. Life equipment and appliances

One of the signs of the type of peoples’ lives is equipment and appliances that they have at their disposal and utilize them to meet their needs. As we note in the literature history book by Zabihollah Saffa, with regards to the affluence and stature of Unsori, Khaghani is quoted as saying:

*Yea Unsori was a privileged poet
 Praised by the kings
 For ten couplets he received a hundred slaves and mush riches
 As much as one could have found in conquering India
 I heard him making the oven out of silver
 He made all of the table tools out of gold*

(Khaghani, quoted by the history of Safa, 1995: 128)

Therefore, an oven out of silver, and gilding the utensil of the table are believed to be signs of property and affluence of Unsori. Here, the poet in an Ivan Ctesiphon ballad shows the pomp and affluence of Pervez in his poem.

*Kasra Ivan, bergamot of gold, Pervez and the golden quince
 Gone with wind leveled with earth entirely
 From each land he went Pervez used to bring back golden leek
 Out of a golden table , he made golden leek a garden*

(Khaghani, anthology, 2000: 359)

This couplet depicts quince, bergamot, leek and a table of gold filled with everything as the signs indicating the pomp, riches and the property of the Iranian King. In the anthology by Shami, there is talk of appliances and equipment, showing on one hand the hard and challenging lives of the people and on the other hand they are seldom represented in the literature.

The relatively long and important poem of Shami that made him popular is the poem *being tenant*. In this poem, the poet introduces himself as a destitute tenant, becoming a telling language of those that cannot express their own pains and woes:

*All of mu property is four daughters and one son
 Two pieces of torn blankets and a pair of old and tatter quilt
 A pair of pillows filled with shard fabric
 When heads hit them , it is like a horny brick
 Four bowls of zinc and one tray
 What am I going to do with being tenant?
 To whomsoever I turn , he reclaims not my right*

(Shami, 2006: 34)

In the old literature, there was a talk of equipment like blanket, quilt, pillow, bowl, and tray and in this poem they are all what the tenant possesses - here the tenant is the poet himself. These matters were rarely described in the old poems.

I've got a carpet which is more like a blanket

It is more suitable to become a packsaddle for a red horse

(Shami, 2006: 41)

If you do not believe my words, God knows it well

What I can find at home is a big tray and a cauldron

(Shami, 2006: 42)

A pair of handles [made of cloth] not worn out[usable]

A splatter, sleeping for years without use

The handle of the masher, tired of mashing beef

Four bowls of zinc and a container of water

Shami's quilt in summer [because of huge rupture]

Should be placed inside basket and be taken away

(Shami, 2006: 79)

Here, too Shami, applies different imagery to describe the equipment and appliances which are very much pleasing and creative.

Each night Samovar, that heart rending old man

Cries bitterly till morning like a man who has lost a beloved

The tray like a graveyard hill

On its corner, it was written the resting place of a glass

The saucer like a tomb and the spoon was like a corpse in it

Each corpse was lying in it

The cup while opening mouth was standing

[With this visage] as if it had lost a beloved

The sugar bowl was like dates for charity

Persistently crying and it was the night of Shaban the 15th

The small pan like a mortuary platform

*Was waiting and expecting
The brazier was like the hill of the Mt. Tour
(The place where Moses used to praise and talk to God)
The tea pot was hopelessly bracing a part of the brazier*

(Shami, 2006: 59-60)

2. 2. Number of people

Another issue discussed by Shami is a high number of people while being tenant. A problem that makes the landlord hires his house to the tenant with reluctance or even rejects him:

*He said how many people are you? I said 10 people
Excepting Robabe, and aunt Mah Parvar,
Zobaide and Malakoot, Nosrat and Keshvar
Nim Taji and Taji, Ushrat and Khavar
The little boy , myself and one wife*

(Shami, 2006: 40)

In addition to this, Shami looks at the issue of crowdedness from another angle and that is a high number of tenant people living in one joint yard:

*Do you know how many we are in a yard
I say fifty people you say fifty four
Tall, short, employed and jobless
At morning when you wake up in the corner of the yard
Twenty people are standing , leaning against the wall
Seventeen tankards one after the other
You need to take a ticket for your turn*

(Shami, 2006: 34)

2. 3. Speech

By speech it is meant three types: a. Conversation, b. Curse, c. Common maxims that the public apply them on different occasions of time and place. Shami, in expressing his thoughts and opinions has benefited highly from the public speech styles and has mixed them with a gentle humor. It can be said, one of the main reasons why Shami is popular among the people is that in addition to his intimate language, his poetic language too is quite close to the

language of people. Another reason is that he deals with social issues in his poetry and this in turn indicates the pains and woes of the people in his own society.

2. 3. 1. Conversation

Conversation is a main part of the peoples' lives and an indicator of the educational level, social class and other issues and for this reason Saadi says " *Until man has said a word. His fault and art be hidden*" (Saadi anthology, 1950, the first chapter of Gulistan: 10) or adds somewhere else " *What is tongue in the mouth O' thou prudent ?/ It is the key to the treasure of an artist/When the door is closed , who knows /It is a gem seller or a peddler*" (Ibid, Gulistan: 5).

Therefore, Shami, applying the conversation and speech styles , tries to depict an angle of the lives of people for us . The following is an example:

I said hello to him, He answered hi, O' my beloved

For what have you held that bowl in your hand?

Want yoghurt? I have nothing nor do I have any syrup if you want

Two types of syrup I've got black and white

I said O' man be alive

A grocer must have everything

The grocer sighed while he was gloomy

And said the infidelity of the people made me old

I said I wanted oil, but pure oil[to make sure of its purity]

If you have some give me some for God sake

He said I'm myself a tribesman and a member of the Kurdish clan

I've brought thirty kilos of oil from my uncle's home

I said how much is a fiftieth(four hundred grams) ?He said six and a half Tomans

I said for God sake give me a fiftieth

(Shami, 2006: 83-86)

In a conversation that takes place between the poet and the grocer, we become familiar with the public speech styles of different classes of the society when attracting customers which is often inappropriate.

2. 3. 2. Curse

Curse is part of the public speech style that is common among them. Shami has used some of those curses in his own poems like the following:

They have a son like a madcap
When at morning he wakes , he comes to the porch
While his pockets are filled with pebbles , holding in his hands a bow and some arrows
He targets the tea pot and the cups, targeting the JafarKhan's mustache
Nobody dares to scream and say
O' mischievous boy break not my head

(Shami, 2006: 33)

2. 3. 3. Maxims

Applying maxims when talking by the people in the streets is another sign that Shami used to apply while composing his poems, describing the way people were talking. Some examples are as follow:

Like a cat that runs to get some fried onions
For a week I was running to hire a home

(Shami, 2006: 41)

When wolf becomes old, his back bends
And is ridiculed and humiliated by a bone eating dog

(Shami, 2006: 65)

Relatives are like the Qibla, but my Qibla is crooked
My kinsmen have left me

(Shami, 2006: 25)

The cattle not enjoying his pains is given to the butcher
The old one says food for the red horse and pains for the ass

(Shami, 2006: 70)

3. CUSTOMS AND ETIQUETTE

Customs and etiquette of the public have embodied in the poems by Shami. One of the instances of customs and etiquette is taking presents and gifts for the relatives on different occasions of celebrations or visiting the others that took place in the past. People to show their affection and emotions against each other used to take gifts for each other.

The following example is a gift that does not make the poet be satisfied while it is regarded as a means of offence for the landlord:

Of my sinister omen

I've got a friend , coming from the village

You probably know him; the headman of the village

Bringing a table of things and a rooster as souvenir

Shafagh , the landlord yelled once more

[May the rooster] be dead 'cause he sings so much

What am I going to do with being tenant?

(Shami, 2006: 39)

I sold the blanket and in return I pledged that Jajim(cloth)

To spend the money for the costs of the New Year

(Shami, 2006: 83)

The last couple was referring to the new year and the coming of the celebrations and people's providing themselves new clothes and candies.

I went to get some oil from the fellow grocer

To make some Halva for the last Friday of the year

(Shami, 2006: 83)

It is common that in the last Friday of the year, People make Halva and distribute it among the neighbors and then go to the cemetery to pray for their dead.

4. CONCLUSION

The present research shows that Shami despite illiteracy and blindness was a capable poet, describing in his poems the sufferings and pains of his own people well. In other words, through a simple and intimate language and with proficient skills has depicted the social problems of his own society and has mixed them with humor. He also has included different factors of life equipment, customs and speech styles in his poems well. Hence, his poetry is among those types of poetry that are listed as social and he can be called a social poet.

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